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## **Blindness doesn't deter Red Level teacher**

**RED LEVEL** – Like other teachers, Joey Arnold has to come up with creative ways of teaching his students. But Arnold has an additional challenge when planning his lessons: he is legally blind.

Arnold, who teaches at Red Level High School, has no vision in his right eye and only limited vision in his left. To compensate, he moves around the classroom a great deal to ensure that he has his students' attention. He also often memorizes his material, since reading from a textbook or using a PowerPoint presentation is not efficient for him.

"The Lord didn't bless me with great vision," he said. "He blessed me with a great memory. I've learned to focus on what I have and not what I don't have."

Arnold is in his third year at Red Level, where he teaches ninth grade world history and 10th grade U.S. History.

Because he is visually impaired, Arnold had a tough time finding a permanent teaching position. He went on 49 interviews before he was offered a job. A stack of rejection letters serves as a reminder of how far he's come.

As a newly elected member of the school board of Coffee County, where he lives, he now oversees the work of many of the principals who once refused to hire him.

Arnold said he is grateful that the Red Level High School principal in Covington County gave him a chance. He said he promised his future boss that he would be a great teacher and get to work on time, with a little transportation help from his wife.

"I'm used to working twice as hard," Arnold said.

To assist him in the classroom, Arnold has a video magnifier, also known as a closed circuit television ( CCTV ), provided by the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services, the state agency that serves people with disabilities. He uses the piece of equipment to read materials and grade papers.

ADRS also assisted Arnold in obtaining his education. He received his bachelor's degree from Troy University, but when he decided to return to school to pursue a master's degree, also from Troy, he called on ADRS for help.

Throughout the process, Ashley Simmons, his ADRS rehabilitation counselor, provided moral support, informed him about job leads and, when he finally landed a teaching job, made sure that he had the assistive technology he needed to succeed.

"I can't say enough about ADRS and Ashley," Arnold said. "I could call him anywhere and anytime and he would talk to me."

As he nears the close of his third year, Arnold said he is hoping to earn tenure at Red Level. And though he's only been teaching a short time, he said he's already heard from parents who credit him with changing their children's lives – something that he had dreamed he would be able to do.

"That's the reason I became a teacher," he said. "I'm a little bit of an idealist. I believe you can make a difference in people's lives."